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A

CENTENNIAL EDITION

OF THE

Semi-Centennial Oration

ON

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE.

PORTLAND:
CENTENNIAL PUBLISHING CO.
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Stephen Berry, Printer, Portland.

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PREFACE.

We have called this oration THE semi-centennial, because it is unique. Among the hundreds of towns which on the 4th of July, 1826, celebrated the close of the half century of American Independence, it was reserved for Dayton, Montgomery County, Ohio, to produce an oration which has survived the second half century, and become a household word in thousands of families in all parts of the Union. It was delivered by PETER P. LOWE, ESQ., and was published by request. In Ohio it is still quoted, as frequently as either Shakespeare or the Bible. It is as quotable as Poor Richard's Almanac. Reader, if it be new to you, do not lay it aside hastily. Reserve it for a leisure hour, refresh yourself with a careful perusal, and you afterwards, on many and various occasions, shall find its rich expressions recurring to your memory, like a cheerful companion, helping you to keep the merry heart that doeth good like a medicine.

When reading the works of Artemus Ward, Josh Billings, Mark Twain, Petroleum V. Nasby, Sut Lovengood and the like, we experience more or less of a drawback on our enjoyment, from a feeling that it was a waste of time for men of talent to have written such stuff. The orations, on the other hand, of Daniel Pratt, or of George Francis Train, fail to give us unalloyed pleasure, because there is always a mingling of compassion with our appreciation of the rare language. With the oration before us there is no drawback of either kind. The author is still living; and has been honored, respected and trusted for the last forty years, for his good judgment, good sense, and attention to the duties of the legal profession; pity, therefore, would be

wasted on him. Nor can we feel at all inclined to reprove him for using his time in writing a burlesque; this oration was a serious effort, and given to the press in a sober conviction that it was worth printing. But, in a few years, the author perceived his mistake, in allowing his fellow citizens to print what he had written while intoxicated with shallow draughts of the Pierian Spring. Drinking deeper had sobered him again, and he endeavored to buy up and burn the oration. Some wag, discovering this, issued a new edition, and saved the work for immortality. Mr. Lowe soon advanced to a still higher stage of wisdom, and joined with the rest of the world in heartily laughing at this most extraordinary ebullition of his youthful zeal and half-acquired learning. If it were not so, if we thought that it would give any pain to him, in his present venerable age, to hear of this reprint, we certainly should have sought some other way in which to raise funds for the Centennial Celebration. But we are happy in believing that he will rather enjoy this new proof of the usefulness of his early effort; useful, although in a very different way from what he, in his boyish dreams, anticipated when he wrote it.

Go forth anew, little work, to contribute to the harmless amusement of mankind; and mayst thou have an immortality beyond that of the oration of Lysias over those who fell on the Isthmus. Certainly no burlesque, written with the design of being ridiculous, can equal the splendor of thy bombastic and well nigh unintelligible flights.

C. P. Co.

All the foot notes are by the present editor.

ORATION.

Friends and Fellow-citizens:

Albeit I have been appointed by the honorable committee of arrangements to perform the duties of orator of this day, being the fiftieth anniversary of our National Independence, it meaneth not my adequacy to be satisfactory.

Having had less time to prepare an oration than is usually given on such an occasion, I can scarcely have a fixed hope of passing the reach of censure and criticism, which may charge on this, the first feeble effort of an unpracticed declaimer. Confidently persuaded, however, that the few clogged and undigested remarks which may fall from the lips of your humble servant, will be so paralyzed as not to be worth eliciting either your condemnation or censure, without another emotion of self-apology, I will proceed to the discharge of that duty which has been so flatteringly intrusted to my care. And in order that you may have a more clear and happier notion, of the object of this day's national commemoration, than I have the presumption to give, I will read to this respectable auditory a copy of a letter written by the venerable John Adams the day after the signing of that ever memorable Chart of Freedom, which you have just heard read; and which is in a style of prophetic enthusiasm, and reads in these words:

"Yesterday, the greatest question was decided which ever was debated in America, and a greater, perhaps, never was, nor will

be decided among men. A resolution was passed, without one dissenting colony, 'that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, and as such they have, and of right ought to have, full power to make war, conclude peace, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which other States may rightfully do.' You will see, in a few days, a declaration setting forth the causes which have impelled us to this mighty revolution, and the reasons which will justify it in the sight of God and man.

* * * * * * *

"The second day of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epocha in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance, by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward, forevermore.

"You will think me transported with enthusiasm, but I am not. I am well aware of the toil, and blood, and treasure that it will cost us to maintain this declaration, and support and defend these States. Yet, through all the gloom, I can see the rays of ravishing light and glory. I can see that the end is more than worth all the means. And that posterity will triumph in that day's transaction, even although we should rue it, which I trust in God we shall not."

The day on which that declaration of freedom was signed, and the day alluded to in this letter, is the Sabbath day of freedom. It is the celebration of this day that has congregated us here; the federal and ingathering States use it as a day of annual festivity—to us it is apt* to be. It has almost become an international custom among nations, to celebrate the birthday and achievements of great and good men; though the practice by some has been denounced with a bitter disapprobation, in consequence of the moral turpitude of venerating man. However proper, or otherwise, this

*Aptus, fitted, or fitting.

practice may be, is left for you to decide. But palsied be the tongue to proscribe, and withered the arm to prevent, the practice of celebrating the birthday of this nation, of commemorating the first jubilee of our independence: of commemorating those imperishable principles of equality that are so naturally implanted on the breast-bone of human nature, as it is in the least creeping insect that crawls the earth, as well as the mightiest animal that stalks in the forest. Is it a privilege then to celebrate this annual peace coming day? It is! and may God grant it may be perdurable as the livid stream of time. Roll back the tide of time to the infancy of this government, to the period of its impotency and oppression, and now behold its rise. Behold the potency of its almighty power; behold her principles as the best digested political fabric known to the civilized kingdoms of the inhabitable earth. To give hearty cheers of jubilation, to these occurrences in her history, is highly commendable; as it ought to remind us, after being grateful to the Author of Space, to be obedient subjects to the laws of this novel and approved government; a nation unsurpassed, by none transcended. That period of our annalist, so methodized and distinguished as the time of discoveries, using the years from 1492 up to 1607, was a period in which the seasons were marked with no other event than human butchery; distress, the most adverse, fell upon the itinerant pilgrims of this continent—after the year 1607, settlements progressed with greater ease and rapidity; though often then, when attempting to set their seal down amid the wild grass of a forest howl, they were deterred by threats and slaughtered by the untame savage. You who emigrated hitherwards have ever had the benefit of a Territorial or State government—enacted by your own agents, and based upon the blood of your peace-making parents.

The continental inhabitants were blighted* with the pat-

*Some copies have, plighted.

ronage of their old mother; avarice stained the parental connection, and the offspring impeached the parents. The promised vein of faith was violated by covinous acts of particularization.*

This bill was born in the English Parliament; it was supported, nursed and matured by diplomatic classicality,† and when enforced it operated upon the heads of the provincials, as the antidote to national error, and a breach of private confidence. Yes, the protectress of the pigmy proved the betrayer of the same: for would it be a fair inference to say, that because England was auxiliary troops to the Americans, during the French war, that the Americans should ever remain a tributary power, and subject to English political and municipal regulations, however unnatural to reason and universal justice? It would not. Yet the assumed right was enforced. It was this that galded the pigmy and made it cry aloud, as the heated embers were rolling in volcanic combustion from the edicts of the Judas parent. The provincial called for equal rights and free principles. A voice heard the necessitous call of the chill-worn‡ inhabitants of the new world, and transmitted unto them the translucent garb of equality: independent of these trials, they met with other catastrophies, which are beyond my reach to decipher.

The Indians who formerly inhabited this, and primitively the old States, have receded by cartel § or otherwise, to other almost impenetrable forests; where they may still exercise the immunity of making a barbecue of each joint of the distrained animal, leaving no vestige here of their tenantship, save the tumuli that are so prominently interspersed over their former habitations. They are gone, going, and are still to go, (it is to be lamented,) as the migratory subjects of power, to the place stipulated in the compact; which

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* Specific acts of deceit. † Benefit to classes.

‡ Intermittent fevers were very prevalent in the West.

§ Military. A writing of truce, &c.

sayeth not the volition was a legal one, or that the liquidated price was a compensatory one, or that the eviction defyeth continual claim.* And it is equally to be feared that the inherent indolence of their nature forbid a hope of their ever being introduced into the folio of civilization; however, they seem happy in their lambent pathway of attenuation. They invoke their Areouski, whiff the calumet of peace, and on *de novo ouster*, they mingle their dithyrambic requiem with the bland breeze that sifts itself through the rush and supple jack of the woods; and as an exhalation of an inheritance abated, the sanctity of the law † has gone forth in its purification, ‡ to withdraw from their eyes the humid curtain of anguish, by urging the sun-worshipers to humiliation under the vine and fig tree of promise, as the future safeguard to become joint heirs of an inheritance under a sure and invariable law dispenser.

It is presumed that the circumstances that occasioned the Revolutionary War have their stained impressions on your memories; that it rooted not in any jealousies or anxiety of carnage and human slaughter on the part of the united colonies, but from an imprejudicated instinct, not to bear the burden of unrepresented taxes and stamp duties. They resisted. England, ever willing to cloud the gray dawn of the occasional ray that broke in distant glimmerings to the hoping vision of the poor provincial, by duties that have elicited one round and universal burst of fulmination by every son § of the continent, by duties that once sucked the very artery of our political respectability as dry as the inner walls of pyramid. This country, in order to expoliate itself from this canker-worm of hardship, it became necessary that they should have recourse, firstly to arms, secondly

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*Legal. The dispossession from their land will not extinguish their title.

†Some copies read "lawn."

‡Some read "glorification."

§Some read "every one of the continents."

De novo ouster—renewed ejection.

to death, in order to obtain their present immunities; which are that all men are born equally free, have certain natural, inherent and unalienable rights. In this chaos of aspect, it became necessary that the lever of management should be wielded and guided by one whose martial prowess and ability were inartificial, strong, pure, prospective; and whose integrity would not be immolated to personal aggrandizement or self-whim. Washington was the genio* of selection; 'twas he who buffed the surge of the impending storm that beaconed† ailing of the most heartrending oppression. Providence and fortune must have aided their choice in so good and so great a man, else we must have been launched in the irretrievable gulph of political slave mire—he became the polar beacon to the distressed Columbian! 'Tis he whose character is unsparingly embosomed in the affections of living millions, as its pellucid shape is symmetrised in the annals of the faithful historiographer.

A true description of his merit must cheer the lowest degraded nature, and leave the unwary ‡ in story and song, in the indefinable labyrinth of wonder, while it newly excites many to climb, by example, the same virtuous spire of interminable glory. Universal admission allows he was a qualified man for all the calls of civil society; whether it be assailed by the poisonous forks§ of despotism, or goaded by unrepresented stamp duties, he was alike firm and inflexible. To acidulate a private or public motive of his, would be eking from the dust of devoted honesty the laurels of national security, happiness and ease. He mitigated the damp cheek of those who "spoke out of tribulation and anguish in many tears."

No official act of his acted as a baleful star to the confed

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*Obsolete, but good in its day.

†Others read "beckoned."

‡Unskilled, unlearned.

§Tongue of hired slanderer.

eration; his attention was ever directed to all points of aggression; he eyed the wave of Champlain, and made the redoubtable nocturnal sortie at Princeton; he humored the tumor of commotion in the disaffected; he allayed the fears of Congress by dispassionate statements. The deliberate potency of his soul never wandered from its aim, or avoided the brazen visitant of death, that glittered in pageantry, and gleamed in tired vengeance, to gain a conquest not unequal in its vicissitudes to that of the Mithridatic war. 'Twas he who was stable in the hour and article of death. He colluded with no party, but collated fate with liberty. Morpheus's embrace never complained of his lethargy, or the camp tent of his indolence. His furtive vigilance watched the haze of distress, whilst the morning shone upon his emblazoned armor in unretrenched delight. But the death wave of carnage ended; he instanter resigned the highest post in the gift of a true* people. And when he left New York for that purpose, the unbroken accents of mingled veneration rended the air, and dissolved in tears, in gratitude to him, the author of personal security, personal liberty, and a signor manual. Yea, he stood in the gates of Thermopylæ for eight years, and no one dare stain his name with a foible.

Equality, power, and a new standard of measures have obviously been the result of his benignant mind; and these truths live in a land when the memory of man runneth to its incult state, and predicament; a land, since only a little while, was lined with the poor doom-stricken red brothers, who grew with the sprig and sproused upon nature's first attitude, and in their stead civilization runs a flattering race. The anticipating genius has touched the luxuriant fibre of internal improvements; the mind's eye of experience approves of domestic manufactories, and a Clay. Washington's presidential career was unspotted as the vestal gleam that

* Others, "free."

glittered from the sun and dances upon the horizon: his name glides along the walls of the political assemblies of these republics; his consistency propped the right of home taxation and immunities; his bust has an abiding place in the cottage, the palace, and the forum; his spirit lingers in the memory of wasted patriots; and when the sequel requiem of their existence rings, his clay lodged voice seemeth to say: "Well done! thou good and faithful patriot; thou hast left the lighthouse of equality* and come home to the general fold of thy fathers, where there is no bloody arrantry to perform, or stint of appetite required;" his maxims bound from the oriental to the occidental shores, and from the arctic to the antarctic circles.

The epithalamium of territorial acquisition has become a proverbial song; the redolent breeze wafts its pennants on the surface of all waters; precepts allowing not equal privilege to the true gentile and atheous wretch, his country knows no evil save the evil of sin. For these probities in character shall we not say, Washington, Oh! Washington!! peace to thy name and dust that lie in the dark valley of the dead. In 1759, Wolfe, Moncton, Montcalm, and Senezergus, noble war-worn spirits of the French war, breathed their last accents on the plains of Abraham! in the precedent conflict Braddock died in the arms of Washington! The gallantry displayed at Breed's Hill; the capture of Fort Chambree; the defeat of Charlton at Longuisle; the skirmishes on the summit brow of Haellem in 1776; the faithful sortie at Monmouth; the vigilance of Pulaski. The settlements of Wyoming met a diabolized butchery. Baron De Kalb, at the head of one brigade at the battle near Camden, withstood a long while Cornwallian skill and device. And, after the strange† veteran had received eleven wounds, he breathed the death vapor of an immolated

* A poetical designation for the United States.

† Foreign.

martyr, for our liberty. Oh! that a little veneration might be transfused into your unbroken and privileged spirits! Can you behold the glowing texture of departed glory and not sigh at the blood rivulet that meandered from the battle summit for such as died at Leuctra and Marathon for our liberty?

These are a very few of the many circumstances attending the conflict of decision, but these are sufficient, amply sufficient, to endear us to those principles as inculcated by our god-like parent and protector. The rays of light and glory, as predicted by the old venerable Ex-President, are verified; they are beaming refulgently, and he has lived to see the end, and the end of his seeing is apt* to be under the administration of his own son. The discrimination, firmness and soundness of diction, in all the arts of our land are not less exalted to those of any other country. The fundamental regulations of the United States, with the State privilege, variation from the uniformity of national policy, are of such a standard and completion as safely secures to each individual his life and property. In this country intrinsic grandeur meets with her due reward; and we proscribe the doctrine that brings a man to power and eminence in consequence of his inheriting the political vein of blood. Though it is almost past our belief, yet it is an unequivocal fact, that this State has settled with a greater rapidity than any other of the sisterhood. Her character in point of population, at the growing age of twenty-four years, stands in the fourth computation; her future prospects second to none. Artificial canal navigation, domestic trade, and a general school system, are fast maturing into usefulness. And whilst the present incumbent of the general head acts upon the base of virtue, that necessary qualification in a republican government, we have nothing to fear. Some of his measures are

*Fitting.

opposed, such as sending diplomatic agents to Panama; many, very many, deem this a good measure, besides a very beneficial both to that and this country.

Soldiers and veterans of the Revolutionary War! You who helped to defend the elements of this political fabric! You who brooked the hard surge of war! You who stood in the fiery furnace of affliction! You who fought with deathless ardor in the chivalrous field of Mars! It is to you we owe the debt and burst of gratitude; it is to you we are bound, by every moral and hororable precept, for our immunities in this life. When the last day of your time hath come to you, and your scar-worn spirits shall have gone down to the dark dusty valley and shadow of death, unattended with our pure and devotional tear, then will the temples of Philo, Ombus, Esneh and Denderah, which from the phonetic key bare the inscriptions of the names of Alexander the Great, Ptolemy, Cleopatra and Beneice, be by time grated into the common dust of the earth.

Though this your hard earned government is less liable, perhaps, to ruin, than any other in the world, yet her great and glorious name may be soiled with the blood of revolution and carnage. Rome once had the centripical power of the whole world within her walls; yet has her power crumbled into ashes, and her seven hills are pruned and worn bare. Julius Cæsar once overcome the Nervii; but where is Cæsar's country? Why! it is scourged by the imperceptible hemlock of luxury. Poor Athens, the birth-place of Sculpture and Geometry! With you the canopy of war has ever darkened your hoping hopes: the blood of Leonidas once stained your Octaran streights, but left you unfettered. Oh! Grecian, raise once more your almighty siege worn arm, and, with fell purpose, revisit the wound of Ibrahim Pacha, and still look in hope for equality and glory, for they may yet light upon your tired brow. Fifty years, my old patriots, have passed down the current and tide of time:

the first jubilee has approached us, not as mercenaries, but as a free people. We see nor hear of no assailing hand to molest the domestic stream of our peace. Your affections for these republics has ever been like Rachel's weeping, who would not be contented, because those around her were not. You have passed the Rubicon of faith and faithfulness, and be it our joy and delight to sooth the wrinkled years of your decline.

Ladies, you, my fair friends, fill a very important character in the human family. It is you that cause every laudable emotion of a virtuous heart. It is you that cheer man, on this dreary pathway of life. It is you that incite research in the various paths of literature. 'Tis you who ennoble his magnanimity in the battle field of death. It is the paragon of your grace, that is the theme of the muse and the songs. When stale melancholy is louped upon the brow, and cruel vicissitudes have marred the hope and prospect of man, then it is you that calms the agitated sea of his troubles.

And when hope, that most ever attending companion of the human race, is obliterated, then, then it is, that you nurse the remaining tendril by a sympathizing participation of his griefs.

"When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou."

THE END.

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